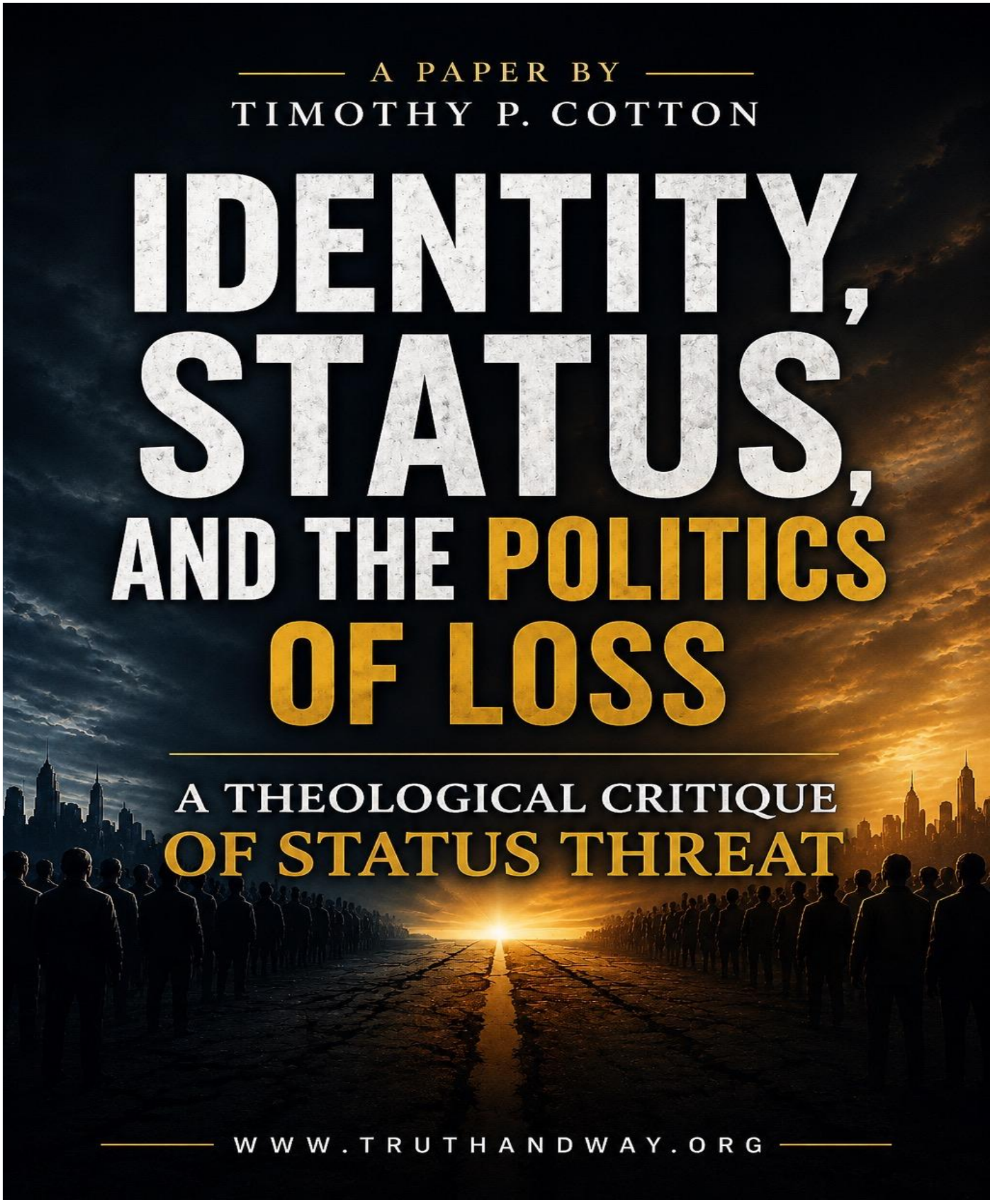
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Identity, Status, and the Politics of Loss:
A Theological Critique of Status Threat

Timothy P. Cotton

Abstract

This paper examines contemporary political polarization through the lens of identity formation, perceived loss, and status threat. It argues that much of the intensity of current political conflict is not primarily ideological, but rooted in the destabilization of identity within historically structured systems of power. Drawing on sociological and political analysis—including the work of Arlie Russell Hochschild, Lilliana Mason, Diana Mutz, and Ashley Jardina—the study shows how experiences of cultural, narrative, and status loss transform politics into a site of identity preservation.

The paper further situates these dynamics within the historical formation of race and assimilation in the United States, drawing on insights from W. E. B. Du Bois and Noel Ignatiev to demonstrate how systems of belonging have been structured through both exclusion and selective incorporation. These processes, it argues, have produced forms of identity that are inherently relational, comparative, and vulnerable to perceived displacement.

In response, the paper offers a theological critique informed by Karl Barth and Jürgen Moltmann, proposing that identity grounded in social status is intrinsically unstable and susceptible to manipulation. By contrast, the Kingdom of God provides an alternative account of identity rooted in divine belovedness rather than social position. This reorientation, it is argued, enables forms of social and political engagement not governed by fear, defensiveness, or exclusion, but oriented toward reconciliation and shared belonging.

I. The Experience of Loss and the Formation of Identity Anxiety

There is a quiet but powerful dynamic shaping contemporary cultural and political life—one that often remains unnamed, yet is widely experienced: the sense that something is being lost.

This sense of loss is not uniform, nor is it always clearly articulated. For some, it manifests as the perception that the pace of cultural change has accelerated beyond recognition. For others, it appears as

a destabilization of values once assumed to be fixed and enduring. For many, however, the experience is less defined, emerging instead as a persistent unease—a feeling that the world no longer coheres in the way it once did.

It is common in public discourse to dismiss such perceptions as exaggerated, reactionary, or misinformed. While such critiques may at times be justified, they risk overlooking a crucial dimension of the phenomenon: the *experience* of loss itself is real, even when its interpretation may be contested. Individuals and communities do encounter social change as disorientation. They do experience the erosion of familiar patterns, and they do perceive that structures once relied upon are no longer stable.

This distinction between **experience and interpretation** is essential. The experience of loss does not automatically validate the explanations that emerge from it. Yet neither can it be ignored without consequence. When the experience is dismissed outright, it does not disappear; it instead seeks alternative frameworks through which it can be understood.

This dynamic is explored in detail by Arlie Russell Hochschild, whose ethnographic study of conservative communities in Louisiana introduces the concept of a "deep story"—a narrative structure through which individuals interpret their place in the world. Hochschild describes this deep story as a "feels-as-if story" that captures emotional truth independent of empirical verification.[1] In the account she presents, individuals imagine themselves as waiting patiently in line for the American Dream, only to perceive others "cutting ahead," often with the perceived assistance of government or cultural elites.[2]

Whether or not this perception corresponds to material reality is not the central point. What matters is that it provides a coherent narrative through which feelings of frustration, displacement, and resentment can be understood. The deep story transforms diffuse unease into a structured interpretation of loss.

At this stage, it becomes necessary to differentiate between **types of loss**, as the term itself encompasses multiple dimensions:

- **Material loss**: economic instability, job displacement, or declining wages
- **Cultural loss**: shifts in language, norms, and shared symbols
- **Status loss**: perceived decline in social standing or recognition
- **Narrative loss**: the sense that one's place within the broader social story is no longer clear

While public discourse often focuses on material explanations, a growing body of research suggests that perceived **status and narrative loss** play a particularly significant role in shaping political behavior. Individuals may experience profound dislocation even in the absence of measurable economic decline, particularly when the symbolic structures that once affirmed their place begin to shift.

This leads to a critical insight: what is often described as "loss" is not always the loss of concrete resources, but the loss of **coherence**. It is the destabilization of a framework through which individuals understand themselves in relation to others.

At this point, the question of identity becomes unavoidable.

Identity functions as the interpretive lens through which individuals locate themselves within the social world. It is not merely a personal construct, but a relational one—formed through interaction with cultural narratives, historical developments, and institutional structures. As Charles Taylor argues, identity is inseparable from the "horizons of significance" within which individuals make sense of their

lives.[3] These horizons are not chosen in isolation; they are inherited, sustained, and contested within broader social contexts.

When these horizons remain stable, identity often operates beneath conscious awareness. Individuals move through the world with a tacit sense of belonging, rarely compelled to question the structures that affirm their place. However, when these horizons begin to shift—when previously stable frameworks are challenged or expanded—identity moves from the background to the foreground of experience.

This transition marks a significant moment of vulnerability. The individual is no longer simply participating in a shared narrative, but is forced to confront the question of where they stand within it.

It is precisely at this juncture that political and cultural tensions begin to intensify. What appears on the surface as disagreement over policy or social change is, at a deeper level, a struggle over the meaning of identity and belonging.

Importantly, this dynamic does not arise solely among those who have historically occupied positions of dominance. While the experience of loss may differ significantly across social groups—and must be understood within those asymmetries—the underlying mechanism of identity destabilization can be widely observed. Both historically central and historically marginalized communities can experience forms of dislocation, though the sources, histories, and consequences of those experiences are not equivalent.

This distinction must be maintained carefully. To recognize that multiple groups experience identity disruption is not to claim that all experiences are symmetrical. Rather, it is to acknowledge that identity, as a relational construct, is affected whenever the structures that define belonging are transformed.

At this point, a pattern begins to emerge.

When individuals experience a loss of coherence—when the frameworks that once provided stability begin to erode—they are compelled to seek new forms of interpretation. These interpretations may take different forms. Some invite reflection, encouraging individuals to situate themselves within a broader and more inclusive narrative. Others offer a more immediate resolution, framing change as threat and positioning identity as something that must be defended.

It is within this space of interpretation that the dynamics of power begin to operate most clearly.

The experience of loss, left unexamined, does not remain neutral. It becomes the raw material through which competing narratives seek to define reality. And the direction those narratives take will shape not only how individuals understand the present, but how they respond to it.

Endnotes

1. Arlie Russell Hochschild, *Strangers in Their Own Land* : Anger and Mourning in the American Right (New York: The New Press, 2016),
2 Ibid.
3. Charles Taylor, *Ethics of Authenticity* (Harvard University Press, 1991)

II. Identity, Status, and the Intensification of Political Conflict

When identity is experienced as stable, political life tends to function within a recognizable framework. Individuals engage in debate, weigh competing ideas, and align themselves with positions that appear reasonable or beneficial. Disagreement, while sometimes intense, remains largely confined to differences in judgment about what ought to be done.

However, when identity becomes uncertain—when individuals begin to question their place within the broader social order—politics undergoes a fundamental transformation. It is no longer primarily concerned with determining outcomes; it becomes a mechanism for securing identity. In such contexts, political engagement shifts from preference to preservation.

This shift marks a decisive escalation in the emotional and social intensity of political life. Disagreement is no longer experienced as merely intellectual or practical; it becomes personal. Compromise, once a necessary feature of democratic negotiation, begins to feel like concession or even betrayal. Opposing viewpoints are no longer perceived simply as alternatives, but as potential threats to one's standing within the social narrative.

This transformation has been extensively examined by Lilliana Mason, who argues that contemporary political polarization is driven in large part by the alignment of political affiliation with broader social identities. In *Uncivil Agreement*, she observes that as social identities align with political parties, political disagreements become more personal and more emotional.[1] What is at stake in political conflict is no longer simply policy, but belonging.

Mason's analysis helps explain why political discourse often becomes disproportionately charged relative to the issues being debated. Beneath the surface of specific policy disagreements lies a deeper, often unarticulated question: *What does this mean for people like me?*

This question reflects the fusion of identity and politics. When individuals perceive that their social group—defined by culture, religion, race, or national identity—is implicated in political change, the stakes of political engagement are significantly heightened. The outcome of political processes is no longer external to the self; it becomes bound up with the preservation or transformation of identity itself.

At this point, political movements acquire a new function. They no longer operate solely as vehicles for policy proposals or ideological frameworks; they become sources of recognition. They validate the underlying experiences of uncertainty, displacement, and loss that individuals may struggle to articulate on their own.

This recognition is often expressed in direct and affective terms:
"We see you."
"We understand what you are experiencing."
"We know what has been taken from you."

Such recognition can be profoundly stabilizing. In moments of identity disruption, the experience of being seen—even through simplified or partial narratives—provides a sense of coherence. It affirms that one's experience is not isolated, but shared.

Yet recognition does not remain neutral. It is immediately followed by interpretation. The same underlying experience of uncertainty can be framed in fundamentally different ways, leading to divergent trajectories of response.

One interpretive framework situates social change within a broader narrative of expansion. It understands the destabilization of identity not as a loss to be resisted, but as an invitation to reimagine belonging in more inclusive terms. Within this framework, individuals are encouraged to situate themselves within a larger, more complex social reality.

An alternative framework offers a more constricted interpretation. It reframes social change as displacement and loss, emphasizing threat rather than transformation. Within this narrative, identity becomes something that must be defended, preserved, or reclaimed.

Both frameworks originate from the same experiential foundation, yet they lead to markedly different outcomes. The first invites participation in a broader and more inclusive social order. The second mobilizes defensive responses oriented toward the preservation of existing boundaries.

This divergence is not merely theoretical; it has concrete implications for how political conflict unfolds. When identity is framed as under threat, political engagement becomes increasingly zero-sum. Gains for one group are interpreted as losses for another. Compromise becomes difficult to sustain, as any concession may be experienced as a diminution of identity.

This dynamic is further reinforced by the process of **identity stacking**, in which multiple social identities—such as race, religion, and political affiliation—become aligned. As Mason notes, the alignment of these identities intensifies polarization by increasing the emotional stakes of political disagreement.[2] Individuals are no longer simply members of a political party; they are participants in a broader social grouping whose identity is perceived to be collectively at risk.

In this context, political conflict takes on an existential dimension. It is not merely about competing visions of policy or governance, but about the preservation of a way of life. The boundaries between political disagreement and social antagonism become increasingly blurred.

It is at this stage that the concept of **status threat** begins to exert its influence, though it will be examined more directly in the following section. For now, it is sufficient to note that the perception of declining status—whether accurate or not—serves as a powerful catalyst for the transformation of identity into a defensive posture.

At the same time, it is important to maintain a critical distinction: the experiences of identity disruption described here are not uniform across all groups. Historical context matters. The destabilization experienced by groups that have long occupied positions of centrality is not equivalent to the ongoing marginalization experienced by others. To recognize that identity can become politicized across different contexts is not to suggest that all such experiences carry the same historical weight or moral implications.

This distinction is essential for avoiding false equivalence. While multiple groups may experience forms of identity anxiety, the structural conditions under which those experiences arise differ significantly. Any adequate account must therefore hold together both the universality of identity formation and the particularity of historical experience.

Nevertheless, the underlying mechanism remains consistent: when identity becomes uncertain, politics becomes a means of securing it.

And when politics becomes a vehicle for identity preservation, it becomes especially susceptible to narratives that simplify complex realities into clear lines of threat and defense.

Endnotes

1. Lilliana Mason, *Uncivil Agreement: How Politics Became Our Identity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018),
2. Ibid.

III. History, Race, Assimilation, and the Formation of Status

To understand why identity is experienced with such intensity in the present, it must be situated within the historical processes that have shaped it. Identity is not formed in isolation, nor does it emerge spontaneously. It is inherited—constructed over time through the interaction of institutions, cultural narratives, and systems of power.

In the United States, one of the most significant dimensions of this formation has been the relationship between race and social hierarchy. This relationship cannot be reduced to individual attitudes or instances of personal prejudice. Rather, it reflects the structural organization of society itself—an organization in which racial categories have functioned as markers of belonging, access, and recognition.

From the earliest stages of national development, race was used to define who was fully included within the social and political order and who was not. These distinctions shaped not only legal rights and economic opportunities, but also the symbolic framework through which individuals understood their place within the national story. Over time, such patterns became embedded within institutions, reinforced through cultural practices, and reproduced across generations.

As a result, certain identities came to be associated with normalcy, authority, and centrality, while others were positioned at the margins. Crucially, because these arrangements were normalized, they often became invisible to those who benefited from them. What was historically constructed came to be experienced as natural.

This dynamic is captured powerfully by W. E. B. Du Bois in his analysis of post–Civil War America. Du Bois observed that even in conditions of economic hardship, white laborers were afforded what he termed a "public and psychological wage," a form of social recognition that reinforced their status despite material limitations.[1] This wage consisted not in wealth, but in the assurance of belonging—of being positioned above others within the social hierarchy.

Du Bois's insight is critical because it reveals that identity and status are not reducible to economic conditions. Individuals may endure material instability while still experiencing a sense of relative security grounded in social recognition. Conversely, when that recognition begins to erode, the resulting anxiety may be experienced as a profound loss—even if material conditions remain unchanged.

Normalization and the Experience of Disruption

When systems of hierarchy are sustained over long periods of time, they come to define the contours of what is perceived as "normal." This normalization operates at multiple levels: institutional, cultural, and psychological. It shapes expectations about who holds authority, whose perspectives are prioritized, and what constitutes the default experience.

For those who have historically occupied positions aligned with this norm, the social world often appears coherent and stable. Identity is affirmed not through conscious reflection, but through the seamless alignment of personal experience with broader cultural narratives.

However, when these structures are challenged—whether through movements for justice, demographic change, or shifts in cultural discourse—the resulting transformation is not experienced uniformly. For those who have long been excluded or marginalized, such changes may represent long-overdue recognition and inclusion. For those whose identities have been aligned with the center, the same changes may be experienced as disruption.

It is important to emphasize that this disruption is not necessarily rooted in explicit opposition to inclusion. Individuals may simultaneously affirm the value of broader participation while experiencing a sense of disorientation as previously stable frameworks shift. The tension arises not from a simple rejection of change, but from the destabilization of a familiar order.

Assimilation and the Expansion of the System

These dynamics extend beyond those who were originally positioned at the center of the social hierarchy. Over time, successive waves of immigrant communities have encountered and navigated the same structural framework.

In seeking stability, opportunity, and social acceptance, many of these communities have engaged in processes of gradual assimilation into what had already been defined as normative. This assimilation has taken multiple forms: the adoption of language, the internalization of cultural expectations, and, in many cases, alignment with the dominant social identity.

This process is particularly evident in the historical incorporation of European immigrant groups—such as the Irish, Italians, and Eastern Europeans—who were not initially regarded as fully belonging within the dominant cultural framework, but who, over time, came to be integrated into it. As Noel Ignatiev argues in his study of Irish assimilation, becoming "white" in the American context was not merely a matter of heritage, but of social positioning within an existing hierarchy.[2]

Importantly, this process of assimilation did not fundamentally alter the underlying structure. Rather, it expanded the boundaries of inclusion while leaving the logic of the system intact. The criteria for belonging remained tied to proximity to the dominant norm, even as the composition of those considered "inside" evolved.

In this sense, the system functioned not only through exclusion, but through selective incorporation. It absorbed new groups in ways that reinforced its own stability. Inclusion was extended, but often on terms that preserved existing patterns of hierarchy and recognition.

Identity Within Structure

This dynamic complicates the formation of identity in significant ways. Individuals and communities are not simply positioned outside the system, reacting to it from a distance. They are also engaged in ongoing efforts to locate themselves within it.

The pursuit of belonging—shaped by the conditions of the system itself—inevitably influences how individuals understand who they are. It shapes how they relate to others and how they interpret the broader narrative in which they participate.

This produces a layered form of identity. On one level, individuals may experience themselves as participants in a shared national or cultural story. On another level, they may remain aware—implicitly or explicitly—of the conditions under which that participation is granted.

For some, identity is experienced as secure, reinforced by alignment with dominant norms. For others, it is experienced as contingent, shaped by ongoing negotiation and adaptation. For still others, it is experienced as contested, marked by exclusion or marginalization.

These differences are not incidental; they are the result of historical processes that have distributed recognition unevenly.

Narrative, Memory, and the Appeal of the Past

In moments of instability, individuals and communities often turn to inherited narratives as a means of restoring coherence. These narratives—accounts of the past, interpretations of identity, and visions of national purpose—provide frameworks through which present experiences are understood.

Such narratives can be constructed in different ways. They may acknowledge complexity, recognizing both achievement and injustice, and inviting participation in a more inclusive future. Alternatively, they may be shaped as calls to return—to recover a past that is remembered as more stable, more predictable, and more secure.

The latter form possesses particular power in contexts of identity disruption. It offers clarity in place of ambiguity and certainty in place of tension. Even when such narratives rely on selective or incomplete representations of history, they resonate because they connect with deeply embedded memories of coherence and belonging.

When these narratives intersect with the experience of loss described earlier, their persuasive force is significantly amplified. They do not need to provide a comprehensive account of reality; they need only align with the story individuals believe they have inherited.

At this point, the role of power becomes increasingly evident. The shaping of narrative is not neutral. It reflects and reinforces particular interests, directing attention toward certain interpretations while obscuring others.

Thus, the challenge posed by contemporary identity conflicts cannot be addressed solely at the level of information or policy. It requires engagement with the deeper question:

What is the story within which identity is being formed?

Until that question is addressed, identity will continue to be shaped by narratives that are partial, selective, and frequently oriented toward the preservation of existing structures rather than the pursuit of truth.

Endnotes

1. W. E. B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America* (1935; repr., New York: Free Press, 1998)
2. Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White* (New York: Routledge, 1995).

IV. Status Threat, Theological Identity, and the Possibility of a Different Future

If identity is shaped by history, structured through systems of power, and activated through experiences of loss, then the question becomes unavoidable: is there an alternative way of understanding who we are?

The preceding analysis has shown that identity, when tied to social position, is inherently unstable. It is dependent upon recognition, reinforced through comparison, and vulnerable to shifts in the broader social order. When that order changes—whether through demographic transformation, cultural development, or movements toward greater inclusion—identity rooted in status becomes susceptible to anxiety.

It is at this point that the concept of **status threat** becomes central.

Status threat refers to the perception that one's social group is losing its relative standing, influence, or cultural dominance within a hierarchical structure. Crucially, this perception does not require direct material loss. It emerges from the experience of **relative displacement**—the sense that one's position within the social narrative is no longer secure.

This dynamic is articulated clearly by Diana Mutz, who argues that contemporary political behavior is often driven less by economic hardship than by concerns about group status. In her analysis of the 2016 U.S. presidential election, Mutz concludes that "the election was more about a sense of group status threat than about economic anxiety."[1] The perception that one's group is losing its dominant position can generate powerful political responses, even in the absence of measurable economic decline.

Similarly, Ashley Jardina demonstrates that identity-based concerns can become politically salient when individuals perceive their group's status to be in decline. She notes that group identity "becomes politically relevant when people perceive that their group's status is under threat."[2] In such contexts, identity is no longer a passive descriptor; it becomes an active site of defense.

These findings align with the broader patterns described in earlier sections. When individuals experience the destabilization of identity—whether through cultural change, historical reevaluation, or shifts in social recognition—they are more likely to interpret these changes through the lens of threat rather than transformation.

At the same time, it is essential to maintain a critical distinction. The experience of status threat is not distributed evenly across all groups, nor does it carry identical implications. The perceived loss of dominance by historically central groups is not equivalent to the ongoing struggle for recognition among historically marginalized communities. The former involves the destabilization of relative advantage; the latter concerns the pursuit of basic inclusion and justice.

To collapse these experiences into a single category would be to obscure the very historical realities that have shaped them. Any adequate account must therefore hold together both the general mechanism of identity destabilization and the particular asymmetries through which it is experienced.

Nevertheless, the underlying dynamic remains consistent: when identity is rooted in status, it becomes reactive. It must be defended, reinforced, and continually secured against perceived threats.

Empire and the Instrumentalization of Identity

It is within this context that the role of what may be described as *empire* becomes most visible. Empire, as used here, does not refer solely to formal political structures, but to a broader logic of power that organizes identity through hierarchy, competition, and control.

Empire does not create the experience of loss ex nihilo. Rather, it appropriates genuine experiences of disorientation and interprets them in ways that sustain its own stability. Social change is reframed as existential threat. Identity is recast as something that must be protected at all costs.

This reframing has significant consequences. A population that perceives itself as threatened is more easily mobilized. A population convinced that it is losing its place is more likely to rally around narratives of restoration. A population focused on defending identity is less inclined to interrogate the structures that shape its conditions.

In this way, identity becomes not merely expressed within political life, but directed—channeled toward particular issues, aligned against particular groups, and mobilized in ways that reinforce existing patterns of power.

The Limits of Status-Based Identity

If identity is grounded in status, it remains inherently unstable for several reasons.

First, it is **comparative**. It derives meaning not from intrinsic worth, but from relative position. To be "above" or "central" is meaningful only in relation to those who are positioned as "below" or "marginal." As a result, identity becomes dependent upon the maintenance of hierarchy.

Second, it is **contingent**. Because social structures are not static, the conditions that sustain status are subject to change. Demographic shifts, cultural transformations, and political developments can all alter the distribution of recognition and influence. Identity grounded in these structures must therefore be continually renegotiated.

Third, it is **defensive**. When identity is tied to position, any perceived loss becomes a threat to the self. The response to change is not openness, but protection. This defensive posture reinforces cycles of polarization, as groups retreat into increasingly rigid boundaries.

These limitations suggest that identity rooted in status cannot provide a stable foundation for social life. It generates anxiety, intensifies conflict, and remains vulnerable to manipulation.

The Theological Reorientation of Identity

Against this backdrop, the Christian theological tradition offers a radically different account of identity—one that is not grounded in status, but in what may be described as *belovedness*.

This reorientation is articulated in distinct yet complementary ways by Karl Barth and Jürgen Moltmann.

For Barth, human identity is grounded in God's prior act of grace. The individual is not defined by social position, achievement, or recognition, but by God's decisive affirmation. As Barth insists, humanity is constituted by God's "Yes" spoken in Jesus Christ—a Yes that precedes and transcends all human systems of valuation.[3] Identity, in this sense, is received rather than constructed. It does not depend upon the maintenance of status and therefore does not require constant defense.

Moltmann extends this insight by situating identity within the horizon of eschatological hope. For Moltmann, human identity is not determined by present conditions, but by God's promised future. In *Theology of Hope*, he argues that Christian existence is oriented toward what is not yet fully realized—a future in which reconciliation and justice are fulfilled.[4] This orientation frees identity from being confined to existing structures. It allows individuals to live within the present without being defined by it.

Together, these perspectives offer a profound reconfiguration of identity. Rather than being rooted in hierarchy, comparison, or social recognition, identity is grounded in the unconditional affirmation of God.

At its most basic level, this can be expressed in simple terms:

You are known.
You are seen.
You are loved.

Not because of where you stand.
Not because of what you have achieved.
Not because of how closely you align with a cultural norm.

But because you are held within the life of God.

Implications for Social and Political Life

This theological reorientation has significant implications for how individuals engage with others and participate in social life.

If identity is rooted in status, others are inevitably encountered as competitors or threats. Their inclusion may be perceived as one's exclusion. Their recognition may be experienced as one's diminishment.

If identity is rooted in belovedness, this dynamic is fundamentally altered. Others are no longer obstacles within a hierarchy, but neighbors—fellow participants in a shared humanity whose dignity does not diminish one's own.

This does not imply the erasure of difference, nor does it negate the reality of injustice. Rather, it relocates identity outside the framework of comparison and competition. It allows individuals to engage difference without experiencing it as existential threat.

In this context, reconciliation becomes possible—not as the elimination of disagreement, but as the transformation of how disagreement is experienced. Freed from the need to defend identity, individuals

become capable of listening without perceiving loss, learning without experiencing diminishment, and participating in a shared life that is not defined by fear.

Belonging Beyond Control

This reconfiguration also reshapes the concept of belonging. Within the logic of empire, belonging is typically conditional—granted through alignment with dominant norms and maintained through the regulation of boundaries.

Within the theological vision of the Kingdom of God, belonging begins not with qualification, but with invitation. It is grounded in a welcome that precedes human control.

In this sense, the community is not constituted by those who determine its boundaries, but by those who recognize themselves as recipients of a grace they did not generate. The "table" is not owned; it is shared.

This form of belonging does not erase identity. It reorients it. Individuals are not required to abandon their histories, cultures, or experiences. Rather, these particularities are brought into a space where they no longer function as markers of hierarchy, but as dimensions of a shared and expanding human story.

Conclusion: Identity Without Fear

The crisis of contemporary political life is, at its core, a crisis of identity.

When identity is tied to status, it becomes fragile, defensive, and susceptible to manipulation. It requires constant reinforcement and remains vulnerable to change.

When identity is grounded in belovedness, it becomes stable, open, and capable of sustaining relationships across difference. It is no longer dependent on hierarchy, no longer threatened by inclusion, and no longer defined by fear.

The alternative offered here is not a withdrawal from the world, but a transformed mode of participation within it: a way of being human that does not depend on status, does not collapse under change, and does not require exclusion in order to survive.

It is, instead, an identity rooted in something that cannot be taken away.

Endnotes

1. Diana C. Mutz, "Status threat, not economic hardship, explains the 2016 presidential vote," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 115, no. 19 (2018): E4330.
2. Ashley Jardina, *White Identity Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019)
3. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, IV/1 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1956),
4. Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 16–18.